

March 5, 1962

MEMORANDUM

TO: Chairman, Panel on Scientific Manpower, PSAC

FROM: Joshua Lederberg, Professor of Genetics

SUBJECT: Realistic View of Immigrant Technical Manpower

May I remark that most discussions of the role and utility of exchange visitors programs take an utterly unrealistic view of our special requirements and capability to absorb scientific and technical talent from other countries, especially undeveloped countries. The United States is at the forefront of an explosion of technical and scientific culture. The premises of this Panel's deliberations are the special requirements that we will face during the next 15 - 25 years. I believe that our immigration policy should take a more realistic view of the urgency of our requirements in science and technology. We have, of course, made a number of progressive steps to facilitate the free passage of scientific talent across national boundaries. However our exchange visitors program in particular is calculated, quite intentionally, to inhibit the flow of recently trained technical people especially from underdeveloped countries to the United States. I would not wish to argue against the desirability of specialized exchange visitors who have been trained in this country returning to their native lands to assist in technical developments there. However, in such countries as Japan, India and even Italy, the capacity of these countries to absorb the more specialized scientific graduates and postgraduate trainees is highly limited and often leads to wasteful frustration of scientific capability. I do not believe that the limitations inherent in the exchange visitors program--the visa provides that the visitor be barred from returning to the United States for a period of at least two years after the expiration of his exchange visit--are really very constructive from the point of view of any of the parties, the United States, the trainee or his home country. We all know from personal experience what a discouragement these immigration provisions have been for the movement of some of the most talented people from abroad who have trained and visited here. I am not anxious to de-populate the scientific talent of other countries, but I believe that we should also consider our own particular needs in the near future as well as the human, non-national aspirations of the people involved. Perhaps the ground rules ought to be that we return just as many trainees to their home countries as we do now, but that we double our international training program so that we can designedly keep at least half of the output for ourselves.

This idea would also have a constructive impact in a number of other ways--for example the motivation and justification for the acceptance of foreign students and fellows in such research training programs as those administered by the National Institutes of Health. Under the present system

we certainly do not bar the acceptance of foreign students but we are bound to be much more uncomfortable about it than we would under the ground rules I propose. This new approach could lead to a general liberalization of our training benefits to foreign nationals. In any case we need hardly advertise the self-serving basis for the liberalization of our scientific immigration policy and could stress that we are helping to implement the non-national basis of scientific advance.

Let me re-state the indicated actions recommended.

1. To remove the blanket restriction on re-immigration of scientists under exchange visitors visas to provide that as many as 50 per cent of them will be eligible for prompt re-entry.
2. To use provision 1 as the justification for a doubling of our present level of activity in accepting foreigners for entry and support in our science training programs.